

# Oregon teen is a bull-riding daredevil

By JULE GILFILLAN  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Fourteen-year-old Najiah Knight is friendly, outgoing and responds to questions with “yes, ma’am” as reflexively as most adolescents roll their eyes.

But those aren’t the only qualities that make the poised, polite teen unique. This 80-pound daredevil rides 800-pound “mini” bulls because “it’s soooo much fun!”

Rodeo is a big part of small-town life across Oregon, and tiny Arlington on the Columbia Plateau is no exception. For as long as there have been ranch hands, riders and stock animals, there have been rodeos to see who could rope-and-tie that calf quickest or ride that big bull the longest.

Traditionally, girls like Knight have competed in horseback sports like barrel racing or pole bending (a sort of high-speed slalom where horse and rider weave through a course of closely spaced poles). But from her earliest days, Knight has been following her father, Andrew Knight, behind the chutes as he prepared for bull riding events and begging him to “put me on!”

“She wanted to always get on something, before she could even dang near walk,” he said. “And I’m like, you’re too little, your time will come.”

That time came when Knight turned 3 and started riding sheep, a sport known as “mutton busting.”



Phillip Kitts

Najiah Knight competing on a mini bull.

“She was a champion mutton buster. I mean, she just gripped on there like Velcro. And there wasn’t no getting her off,” her father recalled. “From there on, there was really no holding her back.”

Along with being the first girl riding with the Mini Bull Riders circuit, Knight made history in early 2020, when she was the first girl to ride a bull at Madison Square Garden in New York City. She also beat all her (male) competitors in the third round. Standing out is something she’s gotten used to.

“Sometimes you feel like you’re just part of the boys. Like, you don’t feel any different and they just accept you.

But sometimes they’ll be like, ‘So I can’t get beat by a girl.’ But, you know, you just gotta show him who’s boss,” Knight joked.

Still, rodeo sports are about as dangerous as they come and having your daughter competing at elite levels (Knight was ranked number seven at the time of her Madison Square Garden appearance) would give any parent pause.

“My stomach goes up and down, probably every rodeo,” her father confessed. One close call at a competition in Louisiana is a prime example.

“She got a little out of position, got jerked down to the ground, got her face mask caved in. (The bull) stepped

*‘I HAVEN’T BROKEN ANY BONES FROM BULL RIDING YET. THANK GOODNESS.’*

Najiah Knight | 14-year-old rodeo competitor

on her mask, pushed it into her eye and swelled her eye shut,” her father said. “But because she had another bull she had to get on that day, they said ‘you don’t have to get on this bull if you don’t want.’ But she was like, ‘I didn’t travel this far to sit here and watch.’ She showed everybody that she was there to compete.”

“I haven’t broken any bones from bull riding yet. Thank goodness,” Knight said, rubbing the scar, now barely visible beside her right eye. Knight demonstrates impressive maturity when asked about the possibility of mortal injury.

“I know if it’s my time,

then it’s my time. But it’s not my time yet, so I’m doing pretty good. Jesus is blessing me. Thank goodness,” she said. “So, yeah, I’m not afraid to get back on it all. I just, you know, shake it off and I’m ready to ride.”

That strong faith will be needed to achieve her big goals.

“My short-time, I guess you can call it, is to be number one this year. Number one in the world. Champion,” she said.

The coronavirus pandemic put a crimp into Knight’s packed schedule of competitions as well as her plans to win that championship in

2020. But she’s looking forward to this year and getting one year closer to her 18th birthday.

“My longtime goal is to be the first girl in the PBR.”

PBR stands for Professional Bull Riders. Knight aspires to compete in the group’s “Unleash the Beast,” a circuit that includes the top bull riders from all over the world. As an Indigenous Paiute and member of the Klamath Tribes, Knight hopes to represent the U.S. as part of “Team Wolves” in the Professional Bull Riders’s Global Cup, a sort of Olympics of bull riding.

“There’s two American teams: Team Eagles and then Team Wolves, which is the Natives. I would be part of Team Wolves because I am Native. I think that would be so cool.

“Four more years,” Knight grins.

## Seeking financial support for son

**Dear Annie:** My son, “Tim,” is engaged to “Jennifer,” a woman whom he’s been seeing for many years. They have two small children together. My problem is that Jennifer will not get a job. Tim supports all of them. She used to work, before their first child, but has not since.

We have all hinted to her about getting a job and even found jobs for her, but her answer is always the same: “I can’t put my kids in day care! Nobody knows them there.” Well, sure — nobody is going to know them if they are always home and don’t meet new kids and people.

Tim and Jennifer plan on getting married in the next couple of years, and I feel like she’s taking advantage of him. Her mom was the same way when she was growing up. Help! What can a person do? He shouldn’t have to work his butt off to support all of them.

— *Mama Needs Help*

**Dear Mama:** I understand your protectiveness: He’ll always be your little boy. But he’s also a grown man, and if he is unhappy with the dynamics with Jennifer — which isn’t even clear, based on your letter — then it’s on him to talk to her about it.

The most you can do is let him know that you’re always

there if he wants to talk about things. Offer an empathetic ear. If he asks for it, then offer your perspective. But whatever you do, quit offering your soon-to-be daughter-in-law the classifieds section. Because despite our best (and well-intended) efforts, our loved ones have this pesky thing called free will — and we need to accept that fact if we want to have healthy relationships with them.

**Dear Annie:** I have a 45-year-old son who is my whole life. But he has always been in and out of the drug scene.

He has two sons of his own, neither of which will speak to him, me or anyone else in our family. This, even though he has always worked and paid his child support. He does have a temper that is out of this world.

Almost 10 years ago, he started going to church and was even baptized and saved. Now, he’s done a 180-degree turn — yet again. He does not work, and he is currently living with his father and me. I try to talk with him, but I

can’t seem to carry on a conversation with him without him getting mad. Yet, he doesn’t appear to be on drugs or drinking.

We really don’t know what to do at this point. We’ve always still invited him to church with us whenever we go, but he never wants to go with us. Any suggestions for me? — *Worried About My Son*

**Dear Worried:** Living for decades with the disease of addiction can warp one’s perspective — and I’m not just referring to your son. You, too, have been living with the disease, and it’s equally important that you seek recovery. There are many resources available, including therapy; books such as Melody Beattie’s “Codependent No More”; and programs such as Nar-Anon (nar-anon.org/virtual-meetings), Al-Anon (al-anon.org), or LifeRing Recovery (lifering.org).

While it’s still difficult to meet up in person for many of us, Nar-Anon and LifeRing are holding online meetings via video conferencing, and Al-Anon hosts telephone meetings in addition to online meetings.

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